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THREE LAYS OF MARIE DE FRANCE

Retold in English Verse

by

FREDERICK BLISS LUQUIENS

NEW YORK
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY
1911

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TO

E. K. L.

PREFACE

Those who have studied the literature of mediæval France are often aggrieved by the general reader's utter ignorance of their favorite authors. Chaucer, Dante, The Nibelungen, The Cid, are names familiar to all—but no one knows even the names of mediæval French poets or poems.

Such a grievance is the present writer's only excuse for attempting to make Marie de France better known to Anglo-Saxon readers. May she some day find a worthier sponsor!

Her poems are of the kind that defy translation. Poems whose beauty is due to sublimity of thought may be more or less successfully translated, but those which, like hers, are merely very charming, resemble many a pretty woman who never takes a good picture. Therefore I have retold, not translated.

I have used, however imperfectly, the metre, vocabulary, and phraseology of those poems which we most naturally associate with the Matter of Britain—"The Idylls of the King." The use of blank verse to represent an original in octosyllabic couplets may seem unwise to some, but here, also, I feared that overfaithfulness to Marie de France would result in injustice to her. Perhaps my violation of the letter of her verse has enabled me the more successfully to reproduce its spirit.

Although my book is intended primarily for those whom intellectual or æsthetic curiosity incites to excursions into the literatures of times and countries not their own, I hope that it may also be useful to beginners in the study of mediæval French literature, especially as an entering wedge into the difficulties connected with the question of Marie's Celtic sources. For the benefit of such readers there shall be added a chapter of bibliography—chained at the end of the book, lest it terrify readers unscientifically in-

clined—which may facilitate further and independent study.

It is a pleasure to acknowledge my indebtedness to Mr. Will Hutchins for many helpful criticisms, and to Mr. Huc-Mazelet Luquiens for the lettering on the cover of the book.

YALE UNIVERSITY,
February, 1911.

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INTRODUCTION

I

We know but little of the life of Marie de France. From hints given us in her own writings we are sure that she lived in the latter half of the twelfth century; that she was a Frenchwoman; that most of her life, however, was spent in the court, then entirely French in speech and spirit, of Henry the Second of England; that she there wrote the poems of which we shall speak presently. Of her personality we may judge somewhat from the nature of her writings. They show us that she was a well-educated woman, for besides her native tongue she knew Latin and English, and a bit of Breton and Welsh. This intellectuality impresses us; another quality, womanly refinement, wins us. Although her poems are not entirely proof against the expurgatorial pen of to-day—times have changed too much—there is not, from

her first to her last line, the slightest semblance of freedom for freedom's sake. We know, lastly, what her public thought of her as an authoress, for we find an over-seriously minded writer of a little later than her time complaining that the lords and ladies of England and France love better to read the lays of "dame Marie" than the lives of holy saints—an unintentional, but all the more convincing, testimonial to her popularity.

With this, however, we have said all that we are able to say of Marie's life. We are nowhere told whether she was of noble birth; whether she was prosperous; whether she was married. We have no grounds for imagining —as one always does of famous women—that she was fair to look upon. We are not even certain that her contemporaries called her, as we do, Marie de France; scholars have manufactured the name out of a line of her writings: "Marie ai num, si sui de France"—"Marie is my name, and I am of France."

Her writings—all in French and all in verse—were three: a collection of about one hundred fables in the Æsopic manner; twelve so-called "Breton Lays," and a poem entitled "The Purgatory of Saint Patrick." These three works have been handed down to us in mediæval manuscripts, and well edited by modern scholars. Scholars agree that the three were all written during the latter half of the twelfth century, but they disagree as to their exact dates, and also as to the order in which they followed one another. Unless entirely new evidence is discovered, the question will probably never be satisfactorily settled.

There is no disagreement, however, as to the relative value of the three. The Fables, it is true, are well written and entertaining; the Purgatory is not uninteresting; but the Breton Lays are immortal. With the passing centuries, said Goethe, they grow ever more charming and more dear—"anmutiger und lieber." Because of this surpassing merit of the Lays we shall confine

ourselves in this small book, which is only a sort of letter of introduction written by us for our twelfth-century friend, to the explanation and interpretation of them alone.

II

The Lays are twelve in number. They are narrative poems, varying in length—the shortest contains 118 lines, the longest 1,184. They are all love-stories. They are all of a romantic nature; though, as we shall see, in varying degrees. They are almost all Celtic, in the sense that Tennyson's "Idylls of the King" are so; that is, Celtic traditions recast in non-Celtic molds.

In order to judge of Marie's poetic genius we must understand what the mediæval Celtic material was, and how she handled it. The subject is of interest not only to students of French literature, but also, inasmuch as mediæval Celtism has come down to our day through various channels, to many others: to Tennyson-

lovers, for instance, seeking the ultimate sources of the Idyll stories; to Wagnerians desirous of knowing whence came Lohengrin, whence Parcival; to students of painting curious as to the motives of Edwin Abbey's "Quest of the Holy Grail."

The plan of our discussion will be as follows: since the Lays were, as already intimated, but a small fraction of a general Celtism of Marie's day, we shall first draw an outline of the larger movement, against which as a background the individuality and the value of her Celtism will stand out in the proper relief.

First of all, then, why did mediæval French writers turn Celtists? About the middle of the twelfth century French literature was in a critical state, near unto death from utter lack of wholesome nourishment. All the meat had long since been extracted from the themes of national tradition; poets and audiences alike were beginning to tire of tales of Charlemagne and of Roland and of their sons and grandsons

and great-grandsons, and of their fathers and grandfathers and great-grandfathers. A newer kind of poetry, imitating pseudo-classical originals, hardly appealed to the masses; nor indeed could true poets find inspiration in the task of recoloring faded Æneases and dim Didos. So some writer, or perhaps several writers at the same time, acting on one of those mysterious common impulses which often affect men's thoughts, conceived the idea of turning to Celtic tradition for fresh material; and for over a century Celtism ruled French writing.

But how, in days when the study of folklore was not yet invented, did all these Celtic stories come to the knowledge of the French writers? Undoubtedly through strolling Celtic minstrels, who had begun to wander abroad at least as early as the eleventh century. For the latter half of the following century we have certain proof of their presence in non-Celtic territory, inasmuch as many French writers of that period mention them explicitly. For the eleventh

we have no absolute proof, but just after its close we find such plain traces of the prevalence of their stories—for example, the curious fact that Italian parents were already naming their sons Arthur and Gawain—that we may be sure they had begun their wanderings at least several decades before. And it was but natural that they should travel abroad, for not only were they bold for such venture because of the traditional high repute of their calling—have not the names of Irish bards come down to us coupled with names of kings?—but, furthermore, their profession had become overcrowded, as witness mediæval Welsh laws forbidding it to any but freemen, and their wares were becoming a drug in the home markets.

I have been using the broad term Celtic in speaking of these strollers. May the adjective be narrowed? It is hardly possible that there were among them any Irish gleemen, for only natives of the border-lands of Celtic territory, who spoke two languages, were capable of

amusing foreign audiences. But were they then Welsh? or Breton? or of both nationalities? If some of their stories were preserved in the form in which they told them, the problem could be easily solved, for the Welsh and Breton dialects of the eleventh century differed considerably. But not a single one of them is so preserved, doubtless because none was ever consigned to writing; in the eleventh century not much but Latin was considered worthy of parchment, and later there was no incentive to guard what French literature had appropriated. This road being closed, let us try others. First, an *a priori* argument. Brittany's more central geographical situation, and, too, the fact that the second tongue of the Bretons was French, then the courtly and literary speech of almost all the countries of Europe, would render likely a Breton preponderance in numbers; but at the same time it is very unlikely that the Welsh should not follow to some extent the tempting example of their cousins—should not travel at

least as far as the French court of England. Secondly, this *a priori* argument is supported by careful study of the traditions as presented in the French adaptations. We find that the great majority of them have a Breton tinge—Breton heroes, for example, and Breton geography—that some, however, have just as certainly a Welsh tinge. Lastly, let us consult those mediæval French writers who mention Celtic minstrels and their stories. Their statements at first disconcert us, for they often speak of "matière de *Bretagne*," and of its dissemination by "les *Bretons*," but never use in this connection the word which means *Welsh*. The definiteness of this information is, however, only apparent, for in the Middle Ages the words "Bretagne" and "Breton" were exceedingly indefinite in signification. We will refrain from the tedious explanation which a full understanding of this problem of terminology would require, and merely state that these words might be applied either to twelfth-century, continental

Brittany, or to sixth-century *Britain*, the insular abode of the *Britons*. Furthermore, in the phrase "matière de Bretagne," the preposition *de*, which may mean either *from* or *about*, is a last straw of ambiguity. So, when mediæval writers use that phrase, we are generally in doubt as to whether they mean material from Brittany, or about Britain, or *vice versa*, or both. Indeed, when we gather and compare all of their statements, so great is the resultant confusion that we are tempted to attribute it to an ignorance on the point at issue as great as our own. Their testimony is therefore valueless in itself, and does not warrant the conclusion that there were no Welsh minstrels at all. It is not entirely without value, however, for it confirms the conclusion which we reached, a moment ago, by two other lines of argument —that the Breton minstrels far outnumbered the Welsh. From this point of view, indeed, the unfair terminology of the twelfth-century writers is not surprising; they, in thus ignoring

the Welsh minstrels, were no more careless than we of to-day in a matter quite analogous, for do we not assume that all our itinerant minstrels are Italians, although some of them are undoubtedly Sicilians, or even Corsicans? So the three roads we have taken all lead to the same end, and we may conclude, finally, that the disseminators of Celtic tradition were both Bretons and Welshmen, but chiefly the former.*

Having thus settled, as well as we may, the nationality of the minstrels, let us inquire into the nature of their stories. Here we shall not need to differentiate between Breton and Welsh; although their stories were tinged differently, as we have said above, the warp and woof were

* The mediæval phrase "matière de Bretagne," the exasperating indefiniteness of which has been touched upon in this paragraph, has been adopted by French literary historians of to-day to connote the sum of Celtic traditions prevalent in Europe during the Middle Ages; and English writers on the subject use in turn the phrase "matter of Britain." The term has become too universal ever to be displanted, but we should always bear in mind that it really means *Celtic* material.

the same, for the fabrics had been first woven when Breton and Welsh were one people. In spite of the fact, already pointed out, that not a single one of these tales has come down to us in its original Breton or Welsh form, we have two ways of inferring in regard to them. In the first place, we are helped by Welsh manuscripts of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; these are veritable store-houses of retold stories, which scholars have been able, if not to refashion into their exact originals, at least to reimagine in the broad outlines and approximate characteristics of those originals. Secondly, we may infer much from mediæval French literature, not only from its many remarks about these stories, but especially from its many adaptations of them. A large part of them, then, were vague and exaggerated historical memories of the sixth century, that fatal period during which the Britons, though fighting under such chieftains as Arthur, could not stem the tide of Anglo-Saxon invasion, and were

finally driven into the corners of England and across the channel into Brittany. Others present striking parallels to Irish traditions, and must be, therefore, remnants of early Celtic mythology and history, incorporated during that period when Gaels and Cymri were intermingled. These two masses of tradition, of an heroic and martial character, in greater part the gleanings of battle-fields, were interwoven through and through with sprigs of humble folk-lore, plucked along quiet waysides and by peasant doorsteps; and all, finally, was impregnated with that peculiar Celtic charm which baffles definition, but which everyone has felt at least indirectly, whether through Malory or through Tennyson, or through any other of the great Celtists of literature. We may add, for the sake of completeness, that the minstrels' repertoires included a few non-Celtic stories, some of them thoroughly Celtized, some of them hardly at all, according as they had been appropriated earlier or later.

As we have inferred the content, so we may also infer the form of these stories, and the manner in which they were presented. The minstrels recited them in prose, but interspersed them with bits of lyric poetry dealing with important moments of the action, and sung to the accompaniment of some musical instrument, generally the Celtic "rote," a sort of small harp. These lyrics were called by a name which the mediæval French adopted in the Francized form "lai," and which we in turn have Anglicized into "lay." As to the language employed, the narrative portions were undoubtedly recited in the speech of the audience, but the lays, which were prized especially for their music, were sung with their original words, just as to-day foreign songs are generally sung without regard to the linguistic ability of listeners.

The stories and songs of the Welsh and Breton minstrels were not, however, the only form in which Celtic material was prevalent in France before French writers adopted it. Their

performances were rivalled in popularity by the imitations of French strollers called "conteors" (recounters), entertainers of a lower order than any other of the literary purveyors of the time. Not one of these imitations has come down to us —probably none was ever given right of parchment—and we must infer their relation to their originals as we infer all else in regard to the "conteors," from hints given us by contemporaneous authors. They reproduced with the utmost freedom the prose portions of the productions of the minstrels, even intermingling with them parts of non-Celtic stories which they had appropriated from elsewhere. Their productions, in contradistinction to those of the Celtic minstrels, might be called pseudo-Celtic material.

Such, then, was the Celtic material, in part genuine, in part spurious, which offered itself to twelfth-century French writers seeking new themes. They seized upon it eagerly. Nor did they distinguish between the genuine and the

spurious; with typical mediæva
acumen, they used it a
they rebuilt crumbling Frenc

In doing this, however, they all without exception wrought two essential changes in their material. First, they neglected entirely the lyric element of their originals; indeed, their spurious originals probably contained none. Doubtless it seemed futile to attempt to reproduce the lays, the beauty of which was in their Celtic music. Secondly—and here again their pseudo-Celtic originals had undoubtedly anticipated them—they Francized their material as much as possible; customs and costumes, ways of thinking and speaking, all are no longer Celtic, but French. For this, however, we must not blame them too harshly. It was not alone their mediæval egoism which caused them to do this; surely some divinity, presider over things literary, has decreed that Celtic tradition should ever be thus de-Celtized, for the modern Celtist, although he usually makes his heroes more Celtic than

theirs as to the outer man, is apt to sin just as much in regard to the inner; Tennyson, for example, is often accused of having turned King Arthur into an English country-gentleman of the nineteenth century. But, after all, they were unable to obscure entirely the Celtic color of their originals, of which even a little is a powerful factor for beauty, and their work is as much entitled to the adjective Celtic as are the "Idylls of the King," the only difference being that the modern poet's Celtism was conscious, theirs unconscious.

Although the two traits just set forth characterize all mediæval French Celtists, in other regards they differ radically. In the light of these differences their writings fall into three groups: the "romans en vers," the "romans en prose," and the "lais," of which last type Marie was probably the inventor and certainly the chief exponent.* Since the "romans," both those in

*Besides the Lays of Marie de France, there are a score or so by other writers. Some of these cannot be called

verse and those in prose, were already in existence when Marie wrote her Lays, we must, in order to complete the background against which her originality may stand out as clearly as possible, understand their essential characteristics.

The "romans en vers" were narrative poems, at least four or five thousand lines in length, written in octosyllabic couplets. Their authors used the Celtic material in much the same manner that authors of the modern historical novel handle their basal data: that is, with great freedom and elaboration. Of their methods of elaboration it is impossible to give an example without quoting at too great length. Whoever desires an illustration—and a few hours of pleasure besides—may read the Welsh tale, "The Lady of the Fountain," in Lady

Breton Lays, inasmuch as they not only contain no Celtic material, but are not even ascribed by their authors to Celtic minstrels; since, however, they are called "lais" in the mediæval manuscripts, it seems necessary to class them with the Breton Lays, and scholars have coined the inclusive term "Narrative Lays." Of all the Narrative Lays there are only a few which possess literary value, and not any which possess the charm of the Breton Lays of Marie de France.

Charlotte Guest's translation of the "Mabinogion," and follow this with W. W. Newell's translation of "Yvain," a poem by the greatest of French Celtists, Chrétien de Troyes. Both stories are retellings of the same Welsh original; whereas, however, the Welsh reteller elaborated but little, Chrétien, by inserting new incidents, by dwelling on interesting episodes, especially by recounting not only the acts of his heroes and heroines, but also their thoughts, many times multiplied his material. As to the other characteristic of their use of the "matière de Bretagne," deliberate alteration as contradistinct from mere elaboration, we can cite no more striking nor more important instance than their arbitrary introduction of King Arthur into all of their poems, whether or no their originals had any connection with him. It would take us too far afield to explain the origins of that wonderful figure of literature—King Arthur; besides, they are unsurpassably explained in Professor Maynadier's book, "The Arthur of the

English Poets." Suffice it to say that this brave captain of the sixth century woke up one morning—in the pages of Geoffrey of Monmouth's "Historia Regum Britanniae," written in 1136—to find himself famous. Through Geoffrey, probably, he passed into the "romans," and there became no less powerful and omnipresent than Charlemagne had been in the old "Chansons de Geste."

The "romans en prose" were long, immeasurably long prose compilations of Celtic stories. The component parts of each compilation generally dealt with the same hero—thus we have the so-called "Lancelot en prose," the "Merlin en prose," and so forth—but the whole showed no co-ordination of material, nor any unity of movement. But if the "romans en prose" thus differed from the "romans en vers" in externals, they resembled them closely in spirit; their authors showed exactly the same freedom in handling their data, and the same methods of elaboration, as the authors

of whom we have already spoken. The popularity of the prose "romans," by the way, proved more lasting than that of those in verse, and they were the vast storehouses which for years furnished foreign writers—Sir Thomas Malory, for example—with Celtic material.

Our background is at last fairly "laid in," as artists say. But, before outlining upon it Marie's individuality, we need to shut off a certain annoying light which shines upon our canvas from an unfortunate angle. I mean the fact that Marie called her poems "lays," which immediately, and naturally, reminds one of the lyrics which the Breton and Welsh minstrels had called by that name. There is, however, no direct connection between their lays and those of Marie; she, like all her contemporaries, neglected entirely the lyric portions of her originals; her poems are purely narrative. Furthermore, they were intended to be read, not sung. It is therefore hard to explain this anomalous term. Perhaps French audiences, having so

often heard the minstrels sing their lays in connection with their prose narrations, applied the name to the whole performance, then to the prose alone when recounted by some "conteor." In that case its adoption by Marie would not have been unnatural. Perhaps Marie, at a loss how to name her new poetic form, called it after the songs which had first attracted her attention to the Celtic traditions—she once speaks of having enjoyed the good music of a certain lay of the minstrels. In any case, the application of the term to narrative poems was unfortunate, for the word continued also in its original and legitimate use—even in mediæval French literature certain lyrics were called "laia"—and the resultant confusion has lasted down to the present day, as witness our dictionaries, which say in one and the same breath that a lay is a short narrative poem and—a lyric.

To prepare our background has been a long task; to paint upon it Marie's individuality, which was striking, and not complicated, will

take but a moment. Like all mediæval French Celtists, she Francized her originals, and neglected their lyric element; like the writers of the verse "romans" she used octosyllabic couplets. But she adopted neither of the principles which we found to be essentially characteristic of both schools of "roman"-writers—freedom and elaboration. On the contrary, she told her stories faithfully; to use her own words, she told each "selon le conte que je sais." Therein lies her individuality as a mediæval French Celtist—in fidelity to her material.

If, however, Marie had retold the stories of the Breton and Welsh minstrels in a spirit of servile imitation, her principle of fidelity would have been dearly bought. We find the key to her method in two sentences taken from the Lays themselves: as to a certain Lay she says, "Plusur le m'unt cunté ("Several have told it to me"); and as to another, that she will tell it "si cum jeo entent la verité," which we may translate, "as I understand the true version

to be." She endeavored to be faithful, then, not to one of the several versions in which each Celtic story must have been prevalent, but to the story itself, to the story as told by its original teller. When, however, we examine her poems carefully, we find that she must have naively considered *form*—the very quality in which mediæval Celtic art was most wanting—to be the criterion of genuineness. Therefore her versions were less genuine than those she was endeavoring to correct. This very misconception, however, saved her poetic reputation, for although she lowered the Celtic coloring, and lessened the Celtic imagination, of her originals, she gave to those originals—in compensation, as it were—the beauty of form. And that her sense of form was almost infallible is proved by this: although she told Celtic stories more simply—in lower terms, one might say—than any poet has ever done before or since, she nevertheless achieved immortality thereby.

III

Of the twelve Lays, I have chosen for this book those which, taken together, may lead to the fullest appreciation of our poetess. They are not the best three—the merit of the twelve is too even to allow of comparison to that extent—but they are certainly among the best. They show, furthermore, the versatility of her narrative talent. "Sir Launfal" is typical of those of the twelve which are in the nature of fairy stories. "The Maiden of the Ash" represents several which are almost realistic. "The Lovers Twain" represents still others, which combine the traits of the two aforesaid classes, inasmuch as the possible events therein related shimmer in an atmosphere of faerie, rendering us incapable of deciding whether to call them stories of real life or fairy tales.

SIR LAUNFAL

My lords, the Breton minstrels sing a lay
Of one called Launfal. Thus the story runs:—

What time the rebel Scots and Picts o'er-
stepped
The border into Logres, and spread war
Through Arthur's realm, that high and cour-
teous King
Went northward, and established in Carlisle
His summer's court. There held he splendid
sway,
Bestowing bounteous favors on the knights
Who made his Table Round, guerdoning them
With wide-spread lands and love of ladies fair.

But there was one who sat in Arthur's hall
Yet knew not Arthur's bounties, having come
But lately to the court from over seas:

A king's first son, but what availed his name,
Far from his kindred, lone in a strange land?
Or what availed his proven knightlihood?
For many envied him, and slandered him,
And Arthur, hearing, misesteemed his worth.
He, all his substance spent, too proud to beg
For royal favor, lived in penury
And lonely tears. There is no crueller grief
Than to be friendless in a foreign land.

Upon a morn Sir Launfal—thus was called
The unhappy knight—rode forth beyond the wall
Which compassed the drear town, thinking to find
Some solace in the fields of June, some joy
Where unconstrained the gladsome river ran.
The horse he rode, a meagre, shuffling jade
Lent by a pitying host—for his own steed
Had long ere this been sold—was weary straight,
And faltered. So, dismounting, he made loose

The tattered traps, and left the nag to roll
Amid the meadow; then, folding his cloak
Beneath his head, laid him among the flowers,
So sorrowful he gat no joy from aught.

'As thus he lay, watching across his tears
The shimmering stream, along its banks he saw
Two maidens moving. Never had he known
Fairer than they, nor ever richer garb
Than their dark-crimson tunics. Straight they came
To where he lay, and he arose and stood,
Awaiting their command. Who spake and said:
"Sir Launfal, us our gracious lady sends,
Our lady fair, to bring you unto her.
Then hasten! She attends impatiently."
He, marvelling, followed where they led, and found
A silk pavilion rich beyond all word—
Not Queen Semiramis of old might buy
One single flap thereof; even the cords

And tenting-pins were priceless. And within
A maiden lay, whose beauty far surpassed
The flower of the lily, or the rose
New opened in the joyful summertide.
She lay upon a couch whose coverlets
A castle could not overweigh in worth,
And o'er her lissome grace an ermine cloak,
With Alexandrine purple lined, was flung
Unheedingly, nor hindering all the gleam
Of shoulders whiter than the hawthorn-flower.

Then paused the knight with gentle courtesy
Until she beckoned him before her couch,
And spake him thus: "Launfal, for thee I come
From fairyworld, where lie the lands I rule.
And if thou provest brave and courteous
As thou dost seem, no king of the wide earth
Was ever happier, for I love thee, friend."
And Launfal looked—and through their joinèd eyes
Swift from her heart to his quivered a spark
Of love, and burst to a great flame. And then

He answered: "Fairest lady, an it please
Your loveliness to brighten my sad heart,
Ye could not lay upon it any toil
Too hard, too grievous. Gladly will I do
Your every heat, for you renounce all men.
God grant that I may serve you evermore."
And she in gladness answered pledge with
pledge—
Thus were the twain made one in truest love.

But time sets ever on despite the joy
Of lovers true. When evening fell apace,
She spake him, saying thus: "Farewell! for I
Must seek my queendom of the otherworld,
Where thou, being mortal, canst not follow me.
But grieve thou not. Henceforth, whene'er thy
heart
Is filled with yearning love, I shall find thee,
And thou shalt be content. Yet hearken, friend!
Let this be deeply graven in thy soul!
The gift of an immortal's love enwraps
One firm condition and inviolable—

Utter concealment. Heed my warning; else
For ever shalt thou lose me, and alone
Long for the love thyself hast rendered vain."
Thus spake she, warning. Then bestowed a gift
Of wondrous sort, a never barren purse,
Wherefrom he could not spend too lavishly,
For spending more, the more it clinked with gold.
And when the maidens twain who served the fay
Had changed his rags for silken fabrics rich,
There was no comelier knight in Arthur's land.
They supped; and fairly to his taste, my lords,
For lingering kisses were the *entremets*.
Then, for the heartless sun had set, they parted.—
He found a splendid steed where late he left
His sorry nag, and thus rode cityward;
Yet ever turning where, unwillingly,
He left behind a loveliness so dear.

But when at last the tent faded from sight,
Mistrusted then his memory—ay, and wept,
Thinking it all a dream. Thus doubting, came
Within the city walls—and doubted not.
For all his men, ill-clad the morn, were garbed
In lavish guise, fit followers of a knight,
Nor knew—God love us—whence or how this change
And magic betterment had come upon them.
He, who perceived the meaning of the change,
Bade them make merry, counting not the cost,
For—look ye! all my purse aclink with gold!
And so it was the morrow, and again
The morrow's morrow—Launfal never lacked
For gold. And spent it well, aiding therewith
Many a knight misused, as he had been,
By cruel fortune; ransoming those who pined
In far captivity; clothing wondrous well
The merry minstrels; sowing everywhere
All without stint the seeds of happiness.—
But none there was who knew from whence this came.

And all the while, whenever Launfal willed,
His lady swiftly came from fairyworld.

And so the days flew by on gladsome wing—
Midsummer-tide, methinks, was come and gone.
Upon a morn a band of shining knights
Disported them within a grove that grew
Against the ivied tower of Arthur's Queen:
Gawain the Courtly, Ywain called the Fair,
With yet a score of others, all renowned,
And Launfal, for the change in his estate
Had wrought a change in their esteem of him—
Ay, now they sought, not shunned his company.
While thus within the leafy wood they lay,
And sang, and merry made, the Queen released
Her casement—looked upon them—marked Sir Launfal.
Then suddenly his courtly grace inflamed
Her wayward heart with fire unquenchable.

Straightway she called the maidens of her bower,
The fairest and most courteous, and ran
Trippingly down the castle steps in haste.
They charged upon the barons with a war
Of mischievous eyes and merrily laughing lips,
And soon the summer winds that waved the wood
Were fraught with whispered dalliance. One alone,
Sir Launfal, shunned the common pleasance, sat
Afar from all, more joyless for their joy,
So incompared—he thought—to his, were this
The hour of tryst with her of faerie.
The Queen beheld him sitting thus alone,
And drawing near, and sighing, softly spake:
"Launfal, my heart is thine—ay, only thine.
Command me as thy slave. For I, the Queen,
Am Launfal's slave! Art thou mayhap content?"
But he dismayed cried out: "Lady, let be!
Long have I served the King and in all faith,

And shall I now be faithless to him? Nay,
Even the shining stain of such a love
Tempteth me not." Then she, with a swift rage,
Scarce knowing what she did, spat in his face,
And hissing if he held his Queen in scorn
It was not virtue, but because he loved
Some other, called him fool—ay, utter fool—
For where, as far as Rome and back again,
Was lady fairer than King Arthur's Queen?
Then Launfal, mad with wrath and quick desire
To answer all the insult of her words:
"Yea, true it is I love, but whom I love
Hath not her match. And hark ye my boast, Queen—
I fling it in your face for your mad words—
The lowliest maiden of my lady's train
Yet far surpasseth you in loveliness."
So spake the angered knight, and she, upsprung,
Speechless from rage, goaded by burning shame,
Fled from before his face, and sought her couch,

Vowing within her heart never to rise
Until—God's name—she fashion some revenge.

So when the King at eventide returned
From merry hunt and coursing the dim wood,
She clasped his knees, beseeching his compassion,
Sobbing that Launfal would have wronged her —yea,
Had sought to make her faithless to her lord;
And when in wrath she scorned his suit, had flung
Vile words and insult on her, vaunting him
Of one far more desirable, so fair
That even the lowliest maiden of her train
Surpassed great Arthur's Queen in loveliness.
Then he, in rightful wrath, for he believed,
Swore he would burn the traitor at the stake
Or swing him from a gallows-tree, and sent
Three barons who should haste and summon him

Before the assembled court to make defense—
If haply for such crime there were defense.

Alas, Sir Launfal sorely is bestead!
For now, although an hundred times he cries,
From fairyworld his love answers him not.
For grief he swoons away, and when his sense
Again returns, again calls piteously,
And curses heart and tongue—and many times
Almost hath riven him upon his sword.

Thus found him Arthur's knights, and summoned him
Before the ordered court. And he complied,
Uncaring what befell him there, fordone
By ever deepening sorrow, seeming scarce
To hear what any said, or understand
The sense of aught. Then Arthur cried in wrath:
"Sir Liegeman—nay, Sir Liegeless, having broke

All faith—thou wouldst have wrought thy
Queen's disfame;
Failing in that, hast shamed her with rude
boast.
Methinks thy lady must be wondrous fair,
That even the meanest maid of all her train—
God's wounds—is fairer than thy master's
Queen!"

And Launfal, thus accused, answered and
said
He had not sought to work the Queen's dis-
fame,
But truth it was that he had vaunted him
Of fairer lady. Whereupon the King
In angry haste bade all his knights convene
For judging him. But they, who much es-
teemed
Sir Launfal, loth to judge him, made excuse,
And prayed the King appoint a day, and call
The lords of his wide land to swell his court.
This present matter was too grave—they said—

To be adjudged by few. Let Launfal find
Good sureties. Then the luckless knight, so far
From home and kindred, had been lost indeed,
Had not Sir Gawain come before the King,
Giving himself and all his men as pledge
That Launfal answer on the appointed day.
So Arthur spake: "I give him unto you,
But at the risk of all ye hold from me
As lawful master." They escorted him
To his abode; essaying all in vain
To comfort him. Nay, inconsolable
His grief. Although they came unceasingly
With new attempts to liven his sad mood,
Scarce could they make him eat or drink, and
feared
Lest he go mad with so great suffering.

Upon the appointed morn from near and far
Were Arthur's barons gathered to his court.
To them Sir Launfal's sureties rendered him.
But they, enjoined to judgment by the King,
Were troubled, pitying him of over seas;

Within their hearts saying—as sunlight shuns
The stagnant fen, so this man all disfame.
Many of them would fainest set him free;
Yet some, fearful of Arthur, were of mood
To work him grievous ill. Then rose and spake
The Duke of Cornwall: "Sirs, good heed behooves us.
The pity of our hearts must not prevail
Against the law—nor yet too great regard
For even Arthur's will. Right must be done,
Let laugh or weep who may. Our King makes plaint
Of this his vassal, charging vile intent
Against the Queen's bright fame; and, yet again,
Rare insolence, boastings not justified,
Which set a rival beauty over hers.
Yet—mark ye—none accuseth save the King,
And by our law a man shall not be judged
Save when two several voices speak against him.
Behooves us now a wisdom doubly wise—
To Arthur loyalty is due, and yet

To Launfal justice. Trench we the knot thus:
Let Launfal summon hither whom he loves,
And if it so appear he boasted not
Unjustly of her beauty, be he free,
For thus he will have proved that he spake not
To slander the high Queen, but through his love.
But else, let him be cast from Arthur's court,
And ever live dishonored in men's eyes."
He spake, and all were in accord, and bade
Sir Launfal summon her he loved. But he,
Scarce making answer, moaned yet deeplier—
Hath he not called her? ay, without all cease?

And so the King, deeming him guilty, urged
To speedy judgment, for the incensed Queen
Ceased not from praying Launfal's punishment.
Wherefore the lords, compelling their slow tongues,
Were even passing sentence, when—behold!
Two maidens rode within the palace hall

On softly pacing palfreys richly trapped.
And both were crimson-robed in costly silks,
And both of beauteous mien. And Gawain then,
Leaping to Launfal where he sat alone,
Unmindful for his grief of all that happed,
Bade him lift up his eyes and be of cheer—
For one of these so fair is doubtless she
Whom thou hast vaunted. He, scarce looking: "Nay,
I know these maidens not, nor understand
Their coming or their going." But the twain,
Advancing through the throng of wondering knights,
Stood from their steeds before the dais, and spake:
"Who bringeth light from darkness, right from wrong,
Preserve thee, Arthur. We entreat of thee
A lodging for our lady, who this eve
Desireth harborage within thy walls."
And this King Arthur granted willingly,

Bidding escort them where they might repose
From toil of travel, and await their dame.

And then the King demanded once again
His barons' judgment, crying he was wroth
For such delay. But they made answer, "Sire,
Doth not the wonder of such loveliness
Excuse our slow decision?"—Then once more
Their voices rose in ever new debate.

And while they tarried, all unwilling still
To judge Sir Launfal, other maidens twain,
Amount of gently ambling Spanish mules,
Rode before Arthur's throne—of fairest mien—
Yea, fairer than the twain who erstwhile came.
And then again the judges were rejoiced,
Thinking that one of these is Launfal's love,
Who now hath come to save her lord from shame.
And Gawain cries, "Launfal, for God's sweet love,
Of these two damsels, fair beyond all word,

Which is thy lady? Speak!" But Launfal looked—
And answered, "Nay, I know these maidens not."
And they alighted meanwhile, and bowed low
Before the King, and all who stood about
Whispered each other there was none so fair
In all the court—not saving the high Queen.
The elder spake in accents sweet and low
As woodland stream: "O gracious King, prepare
Against our lady's coming, who desires
To treat with thee on matter of concern."
And Arthur, ever courteous, welcomed them,
Bidding the servants tend their shining mules,
And sprightly squires escort them where abode
The twain who came before. But then again
Reproached his ever hesitating lords,
Crying that there had been enough delay,
And more would be an insult to his Queen.

So now at last, though none less loth and slow,
The judges needs must vote, and speak the word
To banish Launfal from the land, and crush
The hope of name and fame for aye. But hold!
Up through the city, through the palace gate,
And into Arthur's hall before the throne,
A maiden rides—fairer than all the world.
A milk-white palfrey carries her, and limbed
More daintily than favored steed of king.
Nor is there king so splendid he might buy
Its trappings save he sold or pledged his lands.
And she is robed in fairest linen white
Loose clasped about her shoulders whiter still—
Whiter than snow new-fallen o'er the trees.
Lovely her face, with radiant eyes of gray,
And laughing lips—yea, every lineament
More exquisite than sculptor ever wrought;
Her eyebrows bending as a lissome bow,
Her hair acurl and yellow—threads of gold
Would not outshine those tresses in the sun.
Upon her wrist is perched a sparrow-hawk,

And after her a comely squire controls
A greyhound in the leash. Thus she draws near,
And through the city hasten young and old
To feast their eyes upon her, yet more fair
Than ever fancy imaged Venus to them.

Stately she rode among the gathered lords,
And there was none so cold whose heart beat not
The faster for her beauty—nay, not one
Of all the court who had not leaped and laughed,
Had she enjoined upon him toil or pain.
And those who loved Sir Launfal were rejoiced,
And bade him be of cheer and lift his eyes—
"Of all fair women, lo, the fairest comes!"
And Launfal — hearing — seeing — hardly breathed,
And felt the hot blood course his veins, and cried
"My love!" and then again "My love!" and then

"Now care I not whether I die or live.
Thou hast forgiven. Yea, I see the light
Of thy dear eyes, and all my heart is healed."

And she, advancing through the palace hall—
No fairer creature ever entered there—
Stepped from her horse before the King, and stood
Where all might look upon her. Then, when all
Had looked, and in their eyes she read their praise
And knew their hearts were won, she spake and said:
"Arthur, give ear. And give ye ear who make
King Arthur's court. I whom ye look upon
Once loved Sir Launfal. He before this court
Hath been accused of crime against the Queen.—
The Queen hath lied! He loveth me too dear
For other love.—As for his boast, my lords,
It is not I, but ye, should make award

Whether through me he be acquit thereof."
She spake, and all with one accord adjudge
That Launfal be exonerate from blame.—
Nor doth the King gainsay the just decree.

Then straight—without a word or glance for
him
She came to save—she leaped where stood her
steed,
And though the King and all his knights es-
sayed
To hinder her, entreating her to stay,
Heeded them not, but like a lightning-flash
Galloped amid the throng, and through the
portal.—
But Launfal, with the swiftness of sharp fear
Lest he should lose her alway, ran where rose
Without the palace gateway an old stone,
Whence Arthur's heavy-armored knights were
wont
To mount their steeds. Thence sprang he, with
mad leap,

Upon his lady's palfrey as she fled
From out the palace, and the hurrying steed
Carried the twain away to fairyworld,
To wondrous Avalon—so the Bretons sing—
And nevermore was Launfal seen of men.

THE MAIDEN OF THE ASH

My lords, among the lays of Breton bards
Is one they call "The Maiden of the Ash."
The tale is worth the telling—thus it runs:—

In days of old there lived a valiant lord
In Brittany—the story names him not—
To whom were born two children at one birth.
Glad was the sire, and yet not wholly glad,
Until his dearest friend might share his joy.
A herald sprang to horse, and rode apace
Through day, through night, and came, and cried aloud:
"To him thou lovest, children twain are given.
One shall be named for thee, and pass with thee
The years of youth, shaping his life to thine."

So spake the herald, dropped on bended knee
Before the dais, where his master's friend

And all his court were gathered at the board.
Then he to whom the tidings came thanked God,
Giving a goodly steed to him who brought them.
Not so his wife, who sat beside her lord,
And likewise heard, but laughed right scornfully—
For hers was one of those envenomed tongues
Which dart at every chance for a mean word—
"In God's fair name! I marvel much thy friend
Hath sent thee tidings of his own dishonor!
We know full well the true significance
Of such a story. Woman never bore
Two children at one birth, nor ever will,
Except she serve two masters!" * Thus she spake,

* This strange superstition is of very ancient origin. Aristotle not only cited instances of it, but himself believed in it. Modern investigators find it still firmly rooted among barbaric nations of to-day. During the Middle Ages it was wide-spread, but only half believed in, as is shown by our lay, and by many other mediæval stories.

And though her lord reproached her, and upheld
The honor of his friend's fair dame, the ill
Was done—the ugly rumor ran apace.
And many, who were ignorant, believed;
And many, who were jealous, shook their heads,
Saying "Perchance—we know of stranger things."
Whereby the mother suffered, and her lord.

Yet were they well avenged, for that same year
The slanderer gave birth to daughters twain!

Then did the wretched woman, crazed with grief,
Cry out upon herself, "What may I do?
For ever am I shamed before the world.
My lord and all my kin will cast me out
When this be known, for I adjudged myself
What time I slandered womankind, and said
None ever bore two children at one birth

Except she served two masters. Now my words
Will be remembered for mine own undoing.
Ah, they who carp at others never know
When their own words, like treacherous hounds, may turn
And tear them. Now—would I escape dishonor—
I needs must slay or one or other babe.
Yea, I would rather answer unto God,
Than be for ever shamed before the world."

A servant stood beside her—one who loved
Her mistress earnestly—and heard her rave
Of murdering one or other child. Who strove
To comfort her: "My lady, this is naught.
Dismiss your grief, for all shall yet be well.
Give unto me the babe that ye would slay,
And ye shall be delivered from all shame.
For I this night shall carry her afar,
And leave her at some monastery door—
Someone will find and pity her, please God,
And foster her, and love her as his own."

Thus spake the girl. The other's heart grew glad
With sudden hope—yea, an she do this thing,
The guerdon shall be rare. And so they wrapped
The child—a comely child—in linen white,
And bound a golden bracelet on her arm,
The rim o'erlettered with a foreign script,
A jacinth gleaming from its yellow grasp,
And over all they threw a silken cloth
Brought from Stamboul, flowered with flowing scrolls—
The precious and fair tokens may apprize
Whomever find the babe, and pity her,
That she is not of lowly parentage.
At midnight, while the silent castle lay
In thrall of sleep, the girl received the child
From out the mother's arms—with a hushed prayer
Slipped through a postern-door where ran the road
Amid the darkened village, and straight came

Within the forest. Still she sped, nor stopped
For all the blackness of the deep, dim wood,
Until at last she heard, upon the right,
Dogs baying, and cocks crowing. Then she knew
A town was there, and turning thitherward
As speedily as she might for her tired limbs,
Descried against the dawn a cloister rich
And ample, lifting its gray walls and towers
And steeple unto God. In haste she came
Before the gate, and laid her burden down,
And kneeling, humbly prayed: "Almighty God,
Except Thy will be otherwise, let live
This child, save her from so untimely death."
Then rising, looked about her, wondering where
The child might rest more softly—lo, where grew
An ash-tree fair, with myriad leaflets green
Dancing on countless boughs—and near the ground

The trunk, four-forked, proffered a roomy
crotch.
Straightway she ran and laid the child therein,
Commending her to God all-powerful.
Then fled, and through the forest turned her
home,
And told her mistress all that she had done.

That morn the keeper of the cloister gate
Arose betimes. He rang the matin bells,
Lighted the altar candles, then, as wont,
Drew back the gate. Lo, mid the leaves of the
ash
A fluttering cloth of silk, all richly hued.
The plunder of some contrite thief—he
thought—
A pledge, perchance, of penitence—and ran,
And found the babe enwrapped in the bright
silk—
Still living. Thanking God therefor, he took
The bundle in his arms, and carried it
Right tenderly within the cloister walls,

And called a widowed daughter, who, it chanced,
Was nursing yet her babe. "Up, girl!" cried he,
"Bestir thee, kindle me the fire, and bring
A candle here.—A child! In the ash-leaves
I found it. Give it of thy milk, and warm
And bathe it!" She, complying, suckled her,
And found on her white arm the golden band.
This, and the precious coverlet of silk,
Told them the child was not of lowly birth.
So, when the Mass was said, and from the church
Came forth the Abbess—ye must know, my lords,
The cloister was of nuns—the worthy man
Awaited her, and told her what had chanced.
And when the Abbess saw the child, how fair,
How richly tired in token of high race,
None but herself—she said—might foster her.—
And for the manner of her coming to them,
The child was called the Maiden of the Ash.

Within the cloister walls the foundling grew
To gracious girlhood, springing as a flower.
The Abbess, loving her, instructed her
In all that might befit a noble maid,
And clothed her as the daughter of a king.
And when from girlhood into womanhood
She slipped, throughout all Brittany was none
So good, so fair, so gently courteous,
Noble in mien and nobler still in word.

The strongest baron of the country round—
He who was lord of Dol, a man both brave
And good—heard of the Foundling of the Ash,
How courteous she was, how passing fair,
And loved her ere he saw her. Seeing, loved
Beyond all cure—deeming her fairer still
Than he had heard, and still more courteous—
And swore that he would win her love, for life
Were worthless else. Swore it although he knew
The girl could never be his wife—the match
Were too uneven—he, the Lord of Dol,

Unto a nameless foundling! It were vain
To seek his vassals' sanction. So he choked
The murmurings of his conscience, holding her
Too dear—and yet, perchance, not dear enough—
To yield her.—Yea—but how to win her though?
For if he came again and yet again,
The Abbess might mistrust, and jealously
Protect the maiden from him—thus her love
Were lost for ever. Yet he found a way—
For love is never long perplexed—he sent
A letter to the Abbess, telling her
He fain would give the Church of his broad lands
And of his goods. For oftentimes—he wrote—
His soul grew wearied of this turbulent world,
And longed for refuge somewhere, so he made
This gift of land and goods, trusting to gain
A sort of right of city in the cloister.

The Abbess, for the gift, right willingly
Accorded him the freedom of God's house.—
And many times that year the Lord of Dol
Came to seek refuge from the turbulent world.

And thus he wooed the Maiden of the Ash
Until he won her love. Then, when he knew
She loved him, said to her: "Away, dear heart,
Lest we be hindered. Once our secret known,
Mine eyes would never look on thee again."
And she, who loved him dearly, gave consent,
And fled, and followed him. But took away,
Of all her precious store of ornament
And rich attire—gifts of her foster-mother—
Only the bracelet and bright cloth of silk,
Her own of right—had she not often heard
The story of her coming to the cloister?
Thus gave herself the Maiden of the Ash
Unto the Lord of Dol—and all his house
Soon loved her gentle grace, and her kind words,
Bestowed with equal courtesy on all.

Long time they lived together happily,
Until the barons of the country round,
They who owed fealty to him of Dol,
Began to murmur, saying they were doomed,
If he should die, to serve a low-born master—
For whence hath come this woman of the Ash?
They harassed him, entreating he should take
A wife of noble birth, and put aside
The other. Then, when grumbling naught availed,
Threatening followed: "Well and good, yield not—
But forfeit then for aye our loyal love."
Thus was the knight of Dol enforced to choose
'Twixt losing her he loved, and bringing war
Into his lands. No easy choice, for who
May carelessly bring cruel war on those
Who trust in him for peace and happiness?
Therefore he yielded, bidding bring a wife
After their own hard hearts. "Fair Sire," they said,
"She is already found; she dwells not far.

An only child—*ergo*, much land to boot.
Hazel they call her—truly, for the Ash
A good exchange! doth not the hazel bear
A tasty fruit? the ash-tree beareth none!"—
Coarse pleasantry, unsaid an they had known
The Maiden of the Ash—and thence they turned
In laughter, having set the marriage day.

But when the Ash-tree Maiden knew of this
She wavered not, nor let the deep pain well
To her gray eyes, remembering—gentle heart—
The happiness which he had given her,
Rather than holding him accountable
For happiness which fate had snatched away.
But all the household of the Lord of Dol,
From knight to page—even the serving-men—
Wept bitterly that they must part with her.

Upon the appointed day the Lord of Dol
Summoned his liegemen all. And a gay throng
Of knights and ladies brought the chosen bride;

Her mother with her, happy for her—yet
An undertone of trouble in her laugh,
For she had heard how dearly he of Dol
Had loved the Maiden of the Ash, and feared
He loved her still, and that their lasting love
Might work her daughter grievous harm. So thought
The mother, planning how she might persuade
Her daughter's lord to marry a good man
With her he put aside, for thus—said she—
We should be rid of her—and suddenly,
Amid the joy, and ringing wedding-bells,
A girl of wondrous beauty and sweet grace
Ran toward her, blithely welcoming her, and held
Her stirrup while she stepped from off her steed.
Partly because she felt it in her heart,
And partly for the wonder in the eyes
Of those who stood about, the lady knew
That this was she—the Maiden of the Ash.
And whom a moment gone she feared, her-seemed

She loved. Would she had known, and her own child
Had never come to darken such a heart.

At noon, with solemn pomp, the Lord of Dol
Was married to a maiden of high race.
His own Archbishop joined the twain, and blessed them.

And while the guests made merry, the Ash-tree Maid
Was steadfast in her will to serve her master.
Calling the chamberlains, she bade prepare
The marriage couch, and watched them lest they shirk.
And when they spread a linen coverlet,
Was wroth, saying that it was hardly meet—
But hers was meet—and brought her cloth of silk
And spread it over all, esteeming thus

To do her utmost for the wedded twain—
Save the Archbishop, none might bless the couch.

And when the marriage couch was thus prepared,
At nightfall came the mother to the room,
Bringing her daughter, bride of him of Dol.—
But hardly entered ere she grew so pale
She seemed a ghost, and groped as if struck blind,
Ay, for her heart was fluttering like a leaf.
With faltering voice she calls the chamberlains:
"Tell me," she cries, "tell me, and in all faith,
Where have ye found that cloth of silk?" And one:
"In sooth, my lady, 'twas the Ash-tree Maid
Who threw it over this which lies beneath,
Deeming it fitter. 'Tis her own, I think."
The trembling mother scarcely answered him,
Motioning more than saying, "Bring her here."

They brought the girl, and thus the mother spake,
Feverishly: "Sweet friend, tell me, I pray,
Where hast thou found this silken coverlet?
Whence came it unto thee? Who gave it thee?
Tell me, sweet friend, tell me who gave it thee."
And she: "Lady, the Abbess gave it me,
My foster-mother—ay, and a gold band.
She had them both from those who brought me to her."
"Show me the band of gold," the mother cried,
And when she saw the bracelet, lettered round
With foreign script, doubted no more, but knew
The Foundling of the Ash was her own child,
And sobbing "Girl, thou art my daughter," swooned.

But when the swoon had yielded, bade them find
The maiden's father. Suppliant she clasped
His knees, and wept. He, understanding not,

Essayed to comfort her: "What meanest thou?
What fearest thou from me, to cower thus
All hopelessly? Thou knowest well—God's rood—
I will forgive, however thou hast wrought."
And she, through sobs of sorrow and quick joy:
"My lord, since thou hast pardoned ere thou know
The fault, so dare I speak. Long years agone—
May God forgive—I slandered her who bore
Two children at one birth. Alas, 'twas I
Who suffered most from the empoisoned words.
I bore thee daughters twain—yet thou didst know
Of one alone. The other I cast out.
Ay, but some kindlier instinct made me fold
The cloth of silk about her, thou didst bring
From over seas, and bind on her white arm
The band of gold thou gavest me that day
When first I saw thee—God is merciful:
The coverlet, the bracelet, both are found,
And with them our lost child. Lo, it is she

Who standeth here—the Maiden of the Ash."
But he, in gladness crying "God is good,
Who hath restored her unto us, ere yet
The wrong were doubled," took her to his heart.

And when they told the knight of Dol, he reeled
As one that comes from darkness to bright light,
Blinded by joy, scarce able to believe.

Upon the morrow merrily rang the bells,
Ringing with tones more pure and true, it seemed,
Ringing for her whose grief was turned to gladness.—
Whom joined the Archbishop but yesternoon, ere now
Were sundered, for all—God wot—had willed it so,
Ay, most of all the sister, sharing thus

A sister's joy—and in after time, forsooth,
She too was wed with one she dearly loved.—
And thus, my lords, in midst of a great mirth,
In midst of splendor unmatched before or since,
The Ash-tree Maid, so fair she seemed a queen,
Was joined in wedlock unto him of Dol.

And when the rumor of it spread abroad
Through Brittany, the gleemen sang thereof,
Calling the song "The Maiden of the Ash."

THE LOVERS TWAIN

My lords, the Breton minstrels sing a lay
Of lovers twain who died for utter love
Each of the other. Thus the story runs:—

In yore agone there ruled in Normandy
A gracious King and good—unnamed of them
Who tell the tale—whose Queen, too frail a
flower,
Fading from life when most she yearned to live,
Yet bore an only child, a daughter fair.
And he, who seemed in losing her to lose
All will for love, yet learned to love two-fold,
For in the child the mother lived again.
But when the current of her childhood set
To maidenhood, his heart was filled with fear
Lest he might lose her also, not through death,
But through the natural law which makes a girl
Abandon them she dearly loves for one

She loves even more. How could he part with
her,
Dear for herself, for memory dearer still?
Yet hung ever more imminent the cloud
Of his alarm, for many a great lord
Besought her hand, and they who made his
court
Began to eye askance such miserliness.

(At last, when murmurings marred the fair
address
Of even truest friends, he cast about
For manner of defense against their blame,
Wondering how he might contrive that none
Should even woo her—thus were he absolved.
He bade the heralds cry: "Whoso would win
The daughter of the King—so is ordained
And clearly writ in statute—must be strong
To bear her in his arms up yonder hill,
Nor ever rest him till he reach the top.")
But when the news thereof was spread abroad,
Many there were esteemed the prize too fair

For yielding tamely. Yet were all too weak,
Hardly climbing beyond the middle slope,
Faint and fordone laying their burden down.—
The crafty King at last lived unafraid,
For none attempted more the hopeless task.

Now in that land there dwelt a gentle youth,
Sprung from a noble line, comely of face
And form, and ever fearful lest he be
In knightlihood outdone. Who on a time
Sojourning with the aged King, beheld
And straightway loved his daughter, and implored
The dear return of even the hundredth part
Of all his love. And she, knowing his worth—
Had she not heard her father praise him?—gave
The love he asked; ay, gave an hundredfold
More than he asked. And many times they met
And spake together loyal promises,
But ever hiddenly, fearing the King's wrath,
Hoping—God guide them—soon or late to win

Favor and countenance, saying each to other
'Twere better to endure, deferring hope,
Than haste impatiently, and so lose all.

But who may brag of patience when true love
Tortures without all cease? The youthful knight,
At last too sore oppressed, besought the girl
To flee away, to abandon all for him,
Crying that he could bear his suffering
No longer, answering it were vain entreat
The obstinate King—not his the strength, alas,
To carry her so far. But she replied:
"Dear love, I know thou art not amply strong
To reach the goal unreached by older men;
But if I flee with thee, abandoning him
Who alway held me dear, and whom I love
Second to thee, what should I gain—or thou?
For in destroying thus his happiness,
I should destroy mine own—ay, also thine.
Hold we to other counsel, less unworthy.
In far Salerno, whence my mother came,

Still dwells her elder sister. I have heard
My kinsmen praise her wondrous mastery
Of healing art.) She knows the power and use
Of every root and herb. Go thou, dear love,
With these my letters seek the ancient dame.
(Tell her our plight, and our fond hope deferred,
And she will give thee potions strangely made,
Whereby thy strength shall be increased tenfold.)
And when thou comest, thou shalt ask the King
For his dear child, and he, deeming thee weak
After the full-strengthed men who tried and failed,
Will laugh, and the more presently accord
The hard ordeal. And thou shalt take the gage,
Nor fail, God willing, to achieve thy bride."—
And he, hearing her counsel, leapt for joy.
That night they parted glad with freshened hope.

Unto his castle turned the youth, and straight
Harnessed his palfreys, heaped with a rich store
Stout beasts of burden, laid upon his limbs
Fair garments, lined his purse with yellow gold,
And chose, to be companions of his way,
Of his true men the truest. Tarrying not
They rode, and after many a wearying stage
Attained to far Salerno, where they found
The practiser of healing art. And she,
Reading his letters, gave him welcome glad,
And kept him with her many days, and swelled
The volume of his strength by dexterous drugs.
Then furthermore, when his return was ripe,
Placed in his hands a vial dearly filled,
For be he never so o'erworn, even near
To death, let him but drink that draught, and lo!
A wondrous vigor, coursing the dull veins
And impotent bones, shall make him strong once more.—
And he, not thankless, took the tiny flask;

(Then turned him back toward France and his
dear love.

Nor tarried in his castle, but with trust
In that new strength hastened before the King,
Boldly claiming—ay, sooth—the rude ordeal,
And, prospering in this, his daughter's hand.
The King refused him not—though chiding him
For so great pride and mad temerity,
To hope for happier issue where had failed
So many stronger—and set apart a day.

(Upon the appointed morn from far and near
Were come the liegemen of the King, for so
Had he commanded, shrewdly, with intent
That all should see the madness of a man
Who vaunted him of might for the rude task—
Thus were his treasure safe. And when the
plain
Was thickly darkened by the curious throng,
In sight of all he bade the impatient youth
Raise in his arms his burden—and away!

He, nothing loth, obeyed—but ere he leapt
Where rose the arduous path, laid in her hand
All secretly the vial of wondrous charm.
Then climbed with rapid strides, she clinging to him
Light as a feather—hardly weighing more
In veriest truth—through fasting many days
With hope to aid her lover; ay, that morn
Laying her lightest silks on her fair limbs.
And yet so steep the path her provident heed
Availed him naught, for midway of the slope
She felt his speed and hurrying steps abate,
And cried in fear: "Drink of the draught, dear love.
Thou tirest; drink, and find new strength." But he:
"I need it not, fair friend," for he was mad
With all his joy, mistaking love for strength,
Thinking to win his bride unhelped by aught
Save his own strength, and so refused—alas—
All other aid. Ay truly, made pretense
Of fear—if he should slack his pace to drink—

That some of those who watched from the thronged plain,
Deeming him faint, would shout encouragement,
And some would banter, thus bewildering him
With counter cries—far safer not to drink.
But as he climbed she felt his vigor ebb
Like life-blood flowing free from a wide wound,
And oftentimes he faltered, almost fell.
And she implored unceasingly: "Drink, drink,
And find new strength." But he, relying still
On strength not strength, but sprung from utter love,
Still cried her nay, and reached the crest at last.—
There, victorious, laid his burden down.

Victorious?—Ay, my lords, but all for naught.
Life, like a harp-string stretched too tightly, snapped
In twain. He fell, and God received his soul.

Then she, thinking him swooned, kneeled by
his side,
Purposing now at last to employ the draught
Of wondrous power. In vain! for he lay still;
Nor spake, nor opened his dear eyes; and then—
O God of heaven—she knew that he was dead.
Never was pain more poignant, never tears
More true. Madly she flung herself beside him,
Holding him closely, kissing many times
Those eyes and lips which answered not again.
Then suddenly the sorrow pierced her heart
Like to a poisoned knife—and thus she died.

And to this day the hill whereon they died,
And where they rest forever—ay, the King,
Too late yielding her unto him she loved,
Upon the hill-top laid them in one grave—
Is called the Mountain of the Lovers Twain.

* *

But where her faltering hand, my lords, had
dropped
The flask, letting the potent liquid flow

Upon the earth, a flower fair upsprang,
And spread adown the path which he had trod.
Whereof are brewed—so sing the Breton glee-
men—
Philters unfailing, fraught with truest love.

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LGRP. = *Literaturblatt für Germanische und Romanische Philologie.*
MLN. = *Modern Language Notes.*
MP. = *Modern Philology.*
PMLA. = *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America.*
R. = *Romania.*
RF. = *Romanische Forschungen.*
RLR. = *Revue des Langues Romanes.*
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